

Acts 10:34-43

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Peter Shares the Message of Salvation to Gentiles

Peter preaches the good news of Jesus Christ to Cornelius and his friends and family. He tells them that everything they had heard about Jesus of Nazareth was true, that He is Lord of all and He came to earth to preach peace throughout Israel. He was crucified and raised back to life by God. Peter informs them that he was an eyewitness to Jesus's miracles, as well as His resurrection from the dead. He concludes by explaining that Jesus will one day judge all people, and that everyone who believes in Him will be forgiven.

Peter shares the gospel with the centurion Cornelius, his friends, family, and servants. It is the first time the gospel is preached directly to a Gentile audience. These are Romans who have lived in Israel as an occupying force, but have over time begun to fear the God of Israel and pray to Him. Cornelius has a relationship with God the Father, but he has not yet believed in God the Son.

Peter begins,

Opening his mouth, he said:

"I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality" (v. 34).

His vision earlier (Acts 10:10-16) showed unclean animals being lowered from Heaven in a sheet, while the voice of God commanded him to eat. Peter refused to, not wanting to partake of anything unclean or unholy according to Judaic law. But God said, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (v. 15). Immediately after this, the Roman servants arrived seeking Peter. He then understood that he should not view the Gentiles as unholy, as common, as undeserving to hear the gospel.

As a Jew, Peter belonged to God's "chosen people," a nation God set apart to be priests to the rest of the world to point all other people back to Him. But that chosen status gave way to prejudice toward Gentiles among some Jews, including Peter. They began to believe that God showed *partiality*, that He favored the Jews over all others.

He has now had his heart changed; this chance to tell a Roman centurion about Jesus has caused him to *certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality*, that God wants all people to be reconciled to Him (Matthew 28:18-20, Ezekiel 18:23). God chose the Jews to be a special people, and have a special purpose. But His goal was and has always been to bless all peoples. The calling of the Jews was supposed to be to bless other peoples (Exodus 19:6).

In the coming years, a Council will be called in Jerusalem between the church leaders, addressing the issue of Christian pharisees who are trying to make sure Gentile believers get circumcised and are taught the Law. In essence, they wanted the Gentile believers to become proselyte Jews and follow Jewish religious practice.

But the Council (at which Peter will speak) settles once for all that there are no distinctions to be made in the church, in God's new society that He is creating for His Kingdom. Salvation is found only by the grace of Jesus (Acts 15:11). Peter will also testify to his fellow Jewish leaders that it was through him that God first opened the way to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7).

Here in Acts 10, at Cornelius's house, Peter remarks, *but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him* (v. 35). This is the understanding Peter now has of what God had shown him in the vision while on the rooftop in Joppa (Acts 10:9-16). In detailing the fact that it was through His chief apostle, Peter, that Jesus opened the way to the Gentiles, Luke is documenting a basis for his fellow minister Paul's authority as an apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13). He also documents that Peter endorsed the fact that all peoples are saved the same way: through God's grace.

During Jesus's ministry, Peter saw Christ praise a different centurion for his great faith in Jesus, of whom Christ said,

“Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”

(Matthew 8:10-11)

God is not preferential or partial to ethnicity or nationality. God desires that all be reconciled to Him (2 Peter 3:9).

These ethnic and national divisions are meaningless to God. From two people all others are descended (Acts 17:26). There is only one human race. God sent His Son to die for the entire world, because He loves all the world (John 3:16), He sent the Messiah to Israel to redeem not only the chosen people but everyone else too (Isaiah 49:6). To put an end to sin (Daniel 9:24).

Jesus was not sent only for Israel. But *in every nation* anyone *who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to God*. Cornelius feared God and lived rightly, he was seeking after God, but his knowledge of God was only based on what he had learned in Caesarea from the Jews there. He had yet to believe in the Messiah. This tells us that God had already accepted Cornelius based on the faith he had, but supernaturally moved so that Cornelius and all his family and friends could know more.

The nation of Israel had rejected Jesus the Messiah, because its leaders had rejected Him. So perhaps it was not fully known to Cornelius and his family if Jesus really was the Messiah. Perhaps Cornelius is taking his cues from what he hears the Jewish citizens of Caesarea say. But God has sent Peter to bring the full revelation of His Son's status as Messiah, and the truth about His death and resurrection to this God-fearing Roman.

As the Apostle Paul would later teach the Athenians,

“[God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth...that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us...”

(Acts 17:26-27)

God is not far from anyone. His hand is reaching down to all people, if they would take it. Creation attests to His power and majesty (Romans 1:20; 10:18). The desire to know our Creator is in all men (Ecclesiastes 3:11). But most people choose to seek self, instead of seeking to “grope for Him and find Him.”

Cornelius, however, had groped for and found God’s hand reaching out to him. A man who feared God and did *what was right is welcome* by God, so that God arranged for this meeting to take place, and for Peter’s heart to be ready to forget past prejudices and teach Christ to men outside of the “chosen people.”

Peter continues, *The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)—you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed* (vv. 36-37).

This is interesting and not previously mentioned. It was not clear if Cornelius had heard of *Jesus Christ* before this meeting, but Peter somehow has special insight that, yes, Cornelius and the others gathered there knew of Jesus’s ministry. Peter is obeying Christ’s command, to be a witness to the world, a witness who saw the things done by Jesus.

Here Peter confirms, as an eyewitness, all that Cornelius had heard regarding Jesus, that every bit of it was true. God *sent His word* first to *the sons of Israel*, the Jewish people, to whom Christ and the Apostles have preached up until this point. This *word* from God was *preaching peace through Jesus Christ*. Peter declaratively attests that the man Jesus was God’s *Christ*, His anointed one whom He sent to Israel, and Peter adds *He is Lord of all*. *Jesus* is the Messiah, and He is now rewarded lordship over all creation by His Father based on His obedience in dying for humanity’s sins (Philippians 2:8-11).

To the Hebrews, *peace* (“shalom”) was and is a comprehensive concept of all things coming into harmony, consistent with God’s (good) design. Jesus’s ministry will be not only to restore humanity’s relationship with Him, but also to restore all things (Acts 3:21). God was *preaching peace through Jesus Christ*, but Israel chose instead to follow their own way, consistent with their fathers (Matthew 23:31, 37).

Peter draws his audience’s attention to the fact that *you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea*. Peter asserts that the crowd gathered has heard of these things; the miracle worker, the preaching rabbi who healed the sick and cast out demons, *starting from Galilee*, the northern region of the Roman province of Judaea (Judaea as a whole included *Galilee, Judea, and Idumea—Edom*). The ministry of Jesus started in *Galilee*, where Peter was from, where he first started to follow Jesus.

This began *after the baptism which John proclaimed*, the man John the Baptizer who caused a stir before Christ arrived on the scene, calling for a *baptism* of repentance for all the Jews to prepare them for the coming King (John 1:6-13). Peter confirms that these strange things the God-fearing Romans have heard about over the past decade in Israel—they happened, and they were all of God.

Peter again emphasizes the identity and deity of Christ, that the Romans *know* about this man, *You know of Jesus of Nazareth*. Who sent Him? *God*. You Romans know and have heard how *God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him* (v. 38). Peter appeals to a general knowledge of Jesus that had apparently spread sufficiently such that most anyone could be expected to have heard of it (John 12:19).

This man from *Nazareth* was *anointed by God with the Holy Spirit*,

“After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” (Matthew 3:16-17)

This anointing was done as a sign. To be *anointed* means to be set apart, to be made holy, to be sent for a special purpose to do a specific, special thing. Christ was *anointed* with the sign of the *Holy Spirit* to commission His ministry of reconciliation to God.

Peter points to this *Jesus* of whom this group of Romans had heard, how He spent three years performing attesting miracles to show He was filled with *power* from *God*. Not just once, but for years He did things no man can do, and all of His miracles were acts of kindness and restoration: *He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil*.

Jesus did *good* to all those who were possessed by demons, fallen angels who serve *the devil*, the ultimate enemy of God’s people (Psalm 8:2; 1 Peter 5:8). Jesus did these things because *God was with Him*. Cornelius fears God (v. 2). And Peter is confirming to him that *God was with* the man *Jesus of Nazareth*.

And although Cornelius had heard of the claims about *Jesus of Nazareth*, he apparently had not yet believed in Him in the manner Jesus instructed Nicodemus that people ought to believe (John 3:14-15). But here Peter attests that he saw all these things Jesus did, they actually happened: *We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem*.

Peter asserts to his gathered audience of Gentile Romans who know about this miracle worker, this man who claimed to be the Messiah, that these aren’t just stories. He essentially says “I, Peter, was there, Cornelius.” There are hundreds of other *Jews* who were *witnesses of all the things* Jesus did all throughout *the land of the Jews*, Israel. Peter and the other followers of Christ were also *witnesses* to what *He did in Jerusalem*. This would include Jesus’s death and resurrection, the most important thing Christ did, the very reason He came to earth as a man (John 3:14-17).

Peter points to the crucifixion, *They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross* (v. 39). Cornelius, a centurion of Rome, had doubtless heard of Jesus's *death*, and that it was by *hanging on a cross*. It was the Romans who had invented crucifixion, a method of execution by hanging someone on a wooden post until they suffocated to death. Cornelius had probably seen crucifixions performed, and may have helped carry them out in his younger days as an infantry soldier.

Now Peter confirms the most important thing about Jesus's *death*, that He did not stay dead: *God raised Him up on the third day* (v. 40). Christ was resurrected from the grave. He defeated death (Hebrews 2:14, Revelation 1:18).

Peter points once more to himself and the other followers of Christ as witnesses to these things. These events really happened. Not long ago, in fact. Peter says, God also *granted that He become visible* after He was raised up. But Jesus did *not become visible to all the people*. It was not time for that yet. Israel had rejected their Messiah, to the point of killing Him, as was prophesied (Isaiah 53:3, 7-9). But one day every man and woman on earth will see Jesus again and know He is King of all (Philippians 2:10-11).

For the time being, God revealed this world-changing event to *not all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God*. God, who is sovereign over all outcomes, had *chosen the witnesses* ahead of time. He had *chosen* which *witnesses* He wanted to see His resurrected Son, those who had believed in Him and followed Him throughout His ministry.

Peter specifies, *that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead* (v. 40-41). Not only did we see Him after *He arose from the dead*, we spent time with Him, just as before His death. We fellowshiped with Him. These things really happened. We saw it. We were with Him. We *ate and drank with Him*. He's alive.

Peter was privileged to see the resurrected Jesus (John 20:19-20). About five hundred believers saw Jesus at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6). But only forty days after His resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven, and left His disciples in charge of spreading the gospel to the world (Acts 1:8-9).

God's Messiah resurrected from the grave, and gave us a job to do to spread His teachings to the world, and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18). Peter, again speaking from his personal experience with the Messiah, explains, *And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead* (v. 42).

Jesus *ordered us to preach to the people*, to tell them of what God had done. This refers to what is known as the Great Commission, *ordered* by Jesus to the eleven apostles just before He went up to Heaven. After asserting that He had received all authority in heaven and earth, Jesus then assigns this task to His followers:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am

with you always, even to the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:19-20)

Part of what they were *ordered to preach* was *that Jesus is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead*. Jesus has been *appointed by God* His father to *Judge* all men, *living and dead*, this is part of Jesus’s responsibility and authority as King of the Earth (Matthew 25:31-32, 2 Timothy 4:1). Paul makes a similar statement in his sermon to the Athenians (Acts 17:31).

Jesus will make judgments at different points in time for different purposes. One judgement will be from the Bema Seat, where Christ will evaluate every believers’ works, how faithfully they obeyed Him, so that He may reward or take away rewards (2 Corinthians 5:10, 1 Corinthians 3:12-15). But Jesus will also judge whether people are believers or unbelievers (Matthew 25:31-46). The “goats” (unbelievers) will go to “eternal punishment” while the “sheep” (believers) will go to “eternal life.” It also appears that unbelievers will have their works judged, and will be recompensed accordingly (Revelation 20:12).

In each judgment, He will evaluate the *living and dead*. Of both categories, some are His sheep, those that belong to Him on the basis of faith in Him (*living*), and others are goats, those whom He never knew who will depart from Him eternally (*dead*).

Peter and the apostles were *ordered to preach* about this *Judge*. This miracle-worker whom Cornelius and all gathered have heard of; He was the Son of *God*, and He rose from the dead. He was *appointed by God* to *Judge* every man and woman who ever lived.

Peter points to the Hebrew scriptures as likewise confirming everything he has said, in addition to his own personal eyewitness testimony, *Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins*” (v. 43). Jesus said something similar and taught those whom He disciplined after His resurrection how the scripture predicted His death and resurrection (Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:27).

Some of the *prophets* and their predictions regarding Christ’s ministry that Peter may have been referencing are as follows:

“Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all

To fall on Him.”
(Isaiah 53:4-6)

“I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It is melted within me.
My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
And You lay me in the dust of death.
For dogs have surrounded me;
A band of evildoers has encompassed me;
They pierced my hands and my feet.
I can count all my bones.
They look, they stare at me;
They divide my garments among them,
And for my clothing they cast lots.”
(Psalm 22:14-18)

“They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the Lord, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’”
(Jeremiah 31:34)

“I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud
And your sins like a heavy mist.
Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.”
(Isaiah 44:22)

“...for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch. For behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave an inscription on it,’ declares the Lord of hosts, ‘and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.’”
(Zechariah 3:8-10)

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”
(Ezekiel 36:25-27)

This is the heart and the crux of the gospel, the good news about what Jesus the Messiah accomplished on earth: *through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins*. To be cleansed, to be made right in the sight of God, is available to any person who *believes in Him*.

This is what Jesus told Nicodemus the pharisee when He said,

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.”

(John 3:14-15)

In this passage from John 3, Jesus is referring to an incident in the wilderness where the wandering Israelites were dying from venomous snake bites. God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and tell everyone that whoever looked upon the snake would not die from the venom. God healed everyone who looked (Numbers 21:4-9). All that is required to receive *forgiveness of sins* is simply enough faith to look upon Jesus, hoping to be delivered from death.

To be born again spiritually similarly requires that we recognize we are dying from the poisonous venom of sin, then to look upon Jesus on the cross, hoping to be delivered from death through the promise of God. To believe *in Him* as the Son of God who died for our sins and was raised *up on the third day* (1 Peter 1:3).

[For more on receiving the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus, read our article: “What is Eternal Life? How to Gain the Gift of Eternal Life.”](#)

Biblical Text

³⁴ **Opening his mouth, Peter said:**

“I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality,³⁵ but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.³⁶ The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching [aa]peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)—³⁷ you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed.³⁸ You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.³⁹ We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross.⁴⁰ God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible,⁴¹ not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.⁴² And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”